DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 063 RC 020 898

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TITLE Rural Scholars or Bright Rednecks? Aspirations for a Sense of Place among Rural Youth in Appalachia.
INSTITUTION Appalachia Educational Lab., Charleston, W. Va.
PUB DATE Jan 97
NOTE 33p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academically Gifted; *Aspiration; *Community Satisfaction; Employment Opportunities; High Schools; High School Seniors; Place of Residence; Relocation; Role of Education; Rural Areas; Rural Education; *Rural Youth; Socioeconomic Status; Student Alienation; *Student Attitudes; Student Surveys; Values; Youth Opportunities
IDENTIFIERS Sense of Community; *Sense of Place; *West Virginia

ABSTRACT

This study compares the attitudes of academically gifted rural students with those of their classmates with regard to their communities and their aspirations for a sense of place. Although West Virginia, a largely rural state in Appalachia, is considered by outsiders as a place of deprivation, despair, and backwardness, an aspiration for a sense of place clearly exists among its rural residents. But poor job prospects, along with economic decline, have motivated many West Virginia youth to leave their communities in search of better opportunities. In addition, many educators and community leaders report that students are not active in their communities, a trend believed to reinforce youth outmigration. A questionnaire about students' community satisfaction; ideal community; and perceptions of isolation, powerlessness, and normlessness was completed by 158 academically gifted high school students who attended the 1994 West Virginia Governor's Honors Academy and by 600 high school seniors from 7 rural West Virginia high schools. Results indicate that gifted students placed greater importance on quality of schools when imagining an ideal community than did the comparison group. Gifted students tended toward a more "modern" disposition, which makes it difficult to realize aspirations for a sense of place. In addition, ancillary analyses indicated that very rural gifted students were significantly less satisfied with their communities than gifted students living in more urbanized West Virginia communities. Contains 48 references. (LP)

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ED 404 063

Rural Scholars or Bright Rednecks?
Aspirations for a Sense of Place Among Rural Youth in Appalachia

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January 1997

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RC 020898

Rural Scholars or Bright Rednecks?
Aspirations for a Sense of Place Among Rural Youth in Appalachia[1]

Introduction

The typical study of aspirations examines youths' desire for occupational or educational advancement. Indeed, the literature on occupational and educational aspirations is varied and extensive (e.g., Kuipers, Southworth, & Reed, 1979; Marshall, 1985; Roe, 1956; Sears & McConahay, 1970). With respect to rural youth, the general outlines are also familiar and long standing: rural youth have weaker (usually described as "lower") occupational and educational aspirations (e.g., Smith et al., 1995) and, therefore, schools and other institutions initiate programs to "raise" the occupational and educational aspirations of rural youth (e.g., Metis Associates, 1995). In most of these considerations and investigations, attachment to family and local community is construed, though usually by implication rather than by explicit statement, as the enemy of acceptable occupational and educational aspirations. The struggle is sometimes portrayed as one between modern and premodern ways of life (cf. McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953; Inkeles & Smith, 1974).

However, influential critics (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985) have begun to suggest that the quest for status valorizes greed and undermines the generosity and care that functional communities require. It is no surprise, really, that rural

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[1]Inspiration for this article comes in part from a short, but lively, discussion that took place on the listserv of the AERA Rural Special Interest Group some time ago. The authors wish to thank the participants in that discussion. We also thank staff and students of the 1994 West Virginia Governor's Honors Academy, staff of the West Virginia Department of Education, particularly Ginny Simmons, gifted education coordinator.

Appalachian voices are among the most articulate of those making this criticism (e.g., Berry, 1990). Appalachians who aspire to develop the sense of the place in which they live accept the bad-luck bargain of low pay, low-status employment as the necessary price of their aspiration to cultivate local roots. The modern cultural ethos--which some have called cosmopolitanism--does not acknowledge living well in a particular place as a condition of what philosophers have always considered to be the good life. Instead, the modern ethos privileges mobility, acquisitiveness, and status as the essentials of a happy life (cf. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985).

Education for the good life, instead of the happy life, has seldom been promoted as relevant to rural areas; it has been seldom practiced anywhere (Berry, 1990; Howley, 1989). The difference between a happy life and a good life is the difference between lives governed principally by ethical deliberation and lives governed principally by pleasure-seeking[2]. According to Wendell Berry, in the modern era

> people [began] to live lives of a purely theoretical reality, day-dreams based on the economics of success. It was as if they had risen off the earth into the purely hypothetical air of their ambition and greed. They were rushing around in the clouds, "getting somewhere," while their native ground, the only meaningful destination, if not the only possible one, lay far below them, abandoned and forgotten, colonized by machines. (1989, p. 66)

In this article, we introduce an aspiration quite different from the ones usually considered in relationship to schooling. The object of our research is to consider the aspirations of rural youth for a sense of place--for continued rootedness in rural community. This sort of aspiration

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[2] The difference is part of the contest between liberal and communitarian perspectives that have wracked the world since the mercantile age (cf. Snauwaert, 1993).

is qualitatively different from the aspirations usually studied, and we make no claims about the degree of such aspiration. It is clear from the data to be presented, however, that such aspirations exist, perhaps more widely than professional educators generally care to acknowledge.

The participation of one of the authors in activities of the West Virginia Governor's Honors Academy (GHA) enabled the collection of relevant data from two contrasting cohorts of students--all those attending the GHA and a comparison group of rural students in the schools attended by seven "rural scholars" who attended the GHA. We examine the ideas of community and sense of place as an object of aspiration, describe the methodology and results of the study, and, last, we discuss the study and related literature.

RELEVANT LITERATURE: COMMUNITY AND SENSE OF PLACE

In Rural Community in the Appalachian South, Beaver (1986) describes the characteristics of the unique quality of life associated with the southern Appalachians: a fond identification with a certain place, close ties with people, and a shared history of experience and values. Despite the continuing social and economic dislocations of recent decades, community persists in the southern Appalachians, and, in fact, constitutes a moral system that comes into poignant focus in times of crisis (Beaver, 1986).

Crisis was commonplace in the past, and it is commonplace today. Most recently, communities are in crisis in Appalachia and in much of the Southeast as "economic restructuring" brings the new generation of global competition to the door sills of rural communities (Gaventa, Smith, & Willingham, 1990). Places that once had jobs in coal mining, manufacturing, and agriculture (enterprises which, though sharply depopulated, still figure very

strongly in global competition) are advised to realize new opportunities to employ leftover workers in service-based ventures. In some rural places, for instance, attracting and serving tourists and the elderly are key strategies for revitalizing the local economy. Usually such "opportunities" are rightly regarded by workers as bad-luck because they replace fulltime, unionized labor with unorganized, parttime labor in fast food establishments, homes, and prisons. For example, in West Virginia--the only state completely within the boundaries of Appalachia[3] and whose students are the subject of this study and--the big areas for job growth are in combined food preparation, guards and watch guards, and home health aids (Harmon, 1996).

Rural ways of life are under assault from the mobility into which youth are actively recruited by such institutions as schools, the military, and the media. Despite economic assault and the institutional propaganda, evidence of an aspiration for a sense of place among ordinary rural West Virginians nonetheless clearly exists. In a series of articles published in the Charleston Gazette, reporters considered reasons people in this state held on to home[4]: beauty of the natural environment, small communities, extended family, low crime rate, and easy-going quality of life (Gazette, 1989). The series included letters from readers, interviews, and features documenting the depth of Appalachians' aspirations for cherishing and cultivating their local communities (a construct we are calling "sense of place.") We note that West Virginians aspire to, rather than clearly possess, a sense of place because the place they love--as documented in the

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[3]That is, West Virginia; all of its 55 counties are classified among the 398 specified by the Appalachian Regional Commission as comprising "Appalachia." The ARC definition is the most widely used definition, political compromise though it be (Whisnant, 1980).

[4]"Holding on to Home" was the title of this 40-page series (Gazette, 1989).

series--is under assault (from such enterprises as prisons, garbage dumping, strip mining, and timbering, all of which are undertaken to provide badly needed jobs for residents and position the local community to align with the perceived benefits of engaging the global marketplace).

Rural Youth and Sense of Place

The conflict between modern aspirations and local (in this case, rustic) commitments has educational implications that work themselves out among rural youth. Something is already known of this conflict, though aspirations have seldom been considered as operating in that part of life ("sense of place") that we are considering in this study. Hektner (1995) found that conflict over whether to stay or move was greater among rural as compared to nonrural adolescents. According to his data, rural youth felt "more empty and angry about their futures." In specific, males felt the conflict most sharply and were most negatively affected.

College-bound high school seniors in rural America may aspire to live their adult life in a rural place, but many believe that inadequate job opportunities will require them to work elsewhere. The conflict, however, manifests itself in a hoped-for compromise: rural youth often express the desire to live in a rural place within commuting distance of an urban workplace (Karaim, 1995). Actual population losses in rural areas are most severe among the best educated young adults; more than half of those aged 20 to 34 who attended college between 1985 and 1990 abandoned rural areas (Gibbs & Cromartie, 1994). Schonert-Reichl, Elliott, and Bills (1993) summarize rural students' motives to stay in their communities or to move:

> Because rural youth have close ties to their traditional rural communities they are confronted with the dilemma of either staying in their ruralcommunitiess, which do not

> have an economic base to offer sustaining work, or move away from family and friends in order to succeed in the "modern" world. This pull to remain close to family and friends while at the same time feeling a need to choose an occupation which is congruent with one's education and training, places enormous stress on the rural youth as he or she makes the transition to adulthood. (pp. 6-7)

Rural teachers who wish to value sense of place, however, will have to oppose conventional negative stereotypes of living in rural America. According to the longtime director of the Nebraska Center for Rural Affairs,

> In our rootless and mobile society, you are often judged by where you live. Our society is rich in expressing condescension for rural places and the people who choose to live in them. The places are forlorn, empty, stark, barren, foreboding, forsaken, forgotten, desolate, and abandoned. The people who live there are "left behind." Place becomes at once both a basis for disrespect and the coinage of ego. (Strange, 1996, p. 3).

Rural scholars or bright rednecks?

Backman (1990) believes a rural-urban dichotomy attributes inferiority to rural place. The slurs are known universally, of course: "hicks," "rednecks," "plowboys," "bumpkins," and "hillbillies." Blackman asks pointedly, however, "Where does a comparable list exist that contains negative stereotypical terms for urban people"? (p.4). Urban power is ascendant, and its basis is economic (cf. Jacobs, 1984).

Perhaps no place in rural America has suffered more from this coinage than Appalachia.

In this context, then, understanding the aspirations of talented youth for a sense of place might enrich our understanding of the dilemmas and compromises that rural youth juggle as they confront adulthood. Are academically able Appalachian youth understood to be "bright rednecks" by those who consider Appalachia as a place of deprivation, despair, and backwardness? Are they anomalies in a culture of strong-willed and independent folk for whom formal schooling, academic excellence, and global economic machinations are irrelevant?

Educators know next to nothing about the kind of communities talented rural youth aspire to live in or how satisfied they are with their current communities. We do not know if or to what extent these students differ from their less academically oriented classmates. Such questions have not been asked before.

We do know something about the aspirations and accomplishments of very able youth (i.e., gifted youth) in general. They aspire to and actually attain higher levels of occupational and educational status than other youth. Virtually all aspire to attend college, and one-quarter aspire to earn doctorates; over 90% aspire to employment in the professions (Tidwell, 1980). This combination of preferences and plans is strongly related to eventual occupational status, regardless of IQ, however (Jencks et al., 1979).

The observation about IQ is important, because even among the gifted, many students fail to realize their aspirations. In Terman's highly gifted sample (with average IQS of about 150), less than half became professionals (Terman & Oden, 1959, p. 74). In short, when students are advised to fashion and carry out[5] plans consistent with aspirations for high occupational and

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[5]Follow-through with the plans is what is important; affluence enables follow-through. Gifted students come families who are on average more affluent than other families.

educational status, they are being advised to behave like gifted students.

But perhaps these rural youth have a longing for what Smith (1996) describes in an article titled "Decent Places off the Beaten Path." Smith lists almost 500 small towns considered good places to live based on small size, location, and central functions. He contends that "decent places" represent another kind of location where people can reduce loneliness, achieve well-bring, experience both town and country and sustain community. Smith's effort demonstrates that there are sustainable alternatives to the modernist quest for occupational and educational status commensurate with leading a good life.

West Virginia is the only state completely within the region defined as "Appalachia" (398 counties) by the Appalachian Regional Commission. The perception is sharp here that rural communities are losing their "best and brightest" young people, an exodus believed to undermine rural development efforts. Moreover, many educators and community leaders believe that students are no longer involved in their communities--a disengagement believed to reinforce student aspirations to escape the state's rumored inadequacies.

METHOD

During the 1994-95 school year, the West Virginia Department of Education, the West Virginia Rural Development Council, and the Appalachia Educational Laboratory collaboratively conducted the Rural Scholars Initiative as part of the West Virginia Governor' Honors Academy to address these issues. Eight students from among the 165 who had completed their junior year and participated in the summer 1994 WVGHA, and who were enrolled in a rural high school during the 1994-95 school year as seniors, were identified as Rural Student Scholars ("Rural

Scholars," for short) for participation in the initiative. One student was selected from each of the eight Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) in the state, based on the student's and school's willingness to participate in the initiative. Of the original eight students selected, one choose not to complete the WVGHA and, consequently, did not participate in the Initiative.

Each of the seven remaining Scholars was part of a three-person team that included a teacher from the school attended by the Scholar and a businessperson from the local community. Each Scholar performed two community service-learning activities to learn more about the local community. In one activity, the Scholar and team members organized and conducted a community forum inviting the public to address issues and needs regarding local community and economic development. In the second activity, the Rural Scholar personally interviewed selected persons in the community to gain a broader understanding of individual perceptions about the community. As a third activity, Scholars also administered a questionnaire to all seniors in their home schools. Data from that administration are part of this study.

Appropriate persons in the West Virginia Department of Education, the West Virginia Rural Development Council, and the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) provided technical assistance, via an electronic bulletin board, to help students conduct activities. Such assistance was designed to supplement the sessions held for students at the 1994 GHA and the one-day seminar meeting held for teams. The Rural Scholars also were encouraged to use the bulletin board to communicate with each other and to share related experiences.

In addition, the teams participated in a two-way interactive audio/video teleconference midway through the initiative for a more widespread reporting of progress on the activities of the Initiative. With the help of the West Virginia Teleconference Network, the Rural scholars also

presented the results of their community forums and interviews to a statewide audience of educators, business leaders, and other interested persons.

During the 1994 GHA, 158 of the 165 participating students completed a questionnaire that asked them to give their perceptions of an ideal community and their satisfaction with their own community. GHA students also responded to items on the Dean Alienation Scale (Dean, 1975). The alienation scale measured isolation, powerlessness and normlessness. Questions pertaining to the ideal community were adapted by AEL researchers, and a rural sociologist serving on the West Virginia Rural Development Council, from those used in an Indiana study of rural students (Kenneth Green, May 10, 1994, personal communication).

The Rural Scholars also administered the questionnaire to senior classmates during the fall 1994 semester. Approximately 96 percent (N=644) of the seniors completed the questionnaire. Student responses to the questionnaire serve as the data base for study results reported in this article.

We were interested to compare the two groups of students--the GHA students (the 'high fliers') and the rural-students-at-large. The two groups should be quite different, since one was specifically selected for a statewide program designed for academically accomplished students, whereas the other was selected to represent schools attended by the seven Rural Scholars. At the same time, all students share the experience of being educated in the public schools of counties, traditionally portrayed in stereotype as the heart of benighted, backward Appalachia. Empirically validated contrasts between the two groups (GHA scholars and rural-students-at-large) can serve to help interpret sense of place aspirations among rural Appalachia. We also conducted ancillary analyses comparing subgroups residing in similar communities.

In order to consider issues of interest, and in view of extant literature, we formulated five hypotheses based on the data available:

1. GHA students will exhibit greater levels of alienation as compared to rural-students-at-large.

2. GHA students will be more likely to express preferences that lead them to relocate outside their home communities as adults.

3. GHA students will be less satisfied with their home communities as compared to rural students-at-large.

4. GHA students will value modern or urban amenities more highly than rural-students-at-large.

5. GHA students will value rustic or rural amenities less highly than rural-students-at-large.

Hypotheses were tested with one-way ANOVAs or chi-square analysis, as appropriate given the limitations of the data available. Though of definite interest, we could not consider gender issues in order to preserve rural academic talent and sense of place as our primary foci. Ethnicity was not considered for the same reason (the sample included very few persons of color).

Limitations

The disparate peer group encountered by the seven rural scholars (and others similarly situated) is the focal point of this study. The peer group is composed of two unlike cohorts, GHA students and rural-students-at-large. Comparing such unlike cohorts involves several risks; however, running these risks permits us to open a consideration of rural students' aspirations for a sense of place, particularly the aspirations of students with demonstrable academic talents.

Readers are cautioned to keep the likely differences in the GHA versus the rural-students-at-large in view. Among these differences are socioeconomic status, with GHA students very probably coming from more affluent backgrounds on average. We are nearly certain in concluding, however, that GHA students reside in somewhat more urbanized locations degree of school success; and that they are more successful in school than rural-students-at-large. We addressed this limitation to some extent with an analysis using a balanced sample of students with similar residential backgrounds. The procedure does not control completely for SES and it is based on students' self reports of place of residence.

We also observe that although our modern and rustic disposition scales possess face validity and exhibit good alpha reliabilities and a coherent factor structure, they are not orthogonal. In an attempt to reduce shared variance, we produced factor scores for each scale and correlated the resulting factor score variables. This technique did not appreciably reduce shared variance in either our main or secondary (proxy SES) data set (a data set that will be described later) . Our nonparametric comparisons, used to test hypotheses 4 and 5, nonetheless avoid the related methodological pitfalls. Future development could produce relevant scales that are more distinct and afford the opportunity to use more powerful parametric comparisons. Our evidence suggests that such development has merit in the context of investigations of students' aspirations for sense of place.

RESULTS

The data gathered at the Governor's Honors Academy included scholars' standardized, norm-referenced tests scores (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills percentile ranks), grade-point

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averages, community locale, sex, race, and number of out-of-state colleges to which they intended to apply. The school performance data clearly show that the GHA scholars were very talented by national norms (their modal Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills composite score was the 99th percentile) as well as undeniably accomplished by local standards (their modal GPA was 4.0). Scholars were 54.4% female; had lived a median of 15 years in the same community; 85% lived in places with populations less than 10,000 (self reported data); and by ethnicity 94% were white, 4.6% Asian, and the remainder (i.e., 1.4% or 2 students) were other ethnicities.[6]

Achievement at the 99th percentile is equivalent to a score two standard deviations above the mean. Since achievement is typically lower than measured ability (e.g., IQ), and since performance on IQ measures typically qualifies students to receive gifted services in West Virginia (below the high school level), it is reasonable to describe the cohort of GHA students as being comprised largely of gifted students.

Demographic data on the rural-students-at-large were more limited, but clearly suggest that the back-home cohort of the Rural Scholars, as expected, was indeed somewhat more rural: 99 percent lived in communities with populations under 10,000. Additionally, rural students were 50.3% female and 49.7% male. Superficially, the backgrounds of the GHA students do not seem terribly different from those of rural-students-at-large. The largest probable difference, which can only be inferred from the description of GHA students as gifted, would likely be social class background. Gifted students typically come from families more affluent than

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[6]According to the School District Data Book (http://www.ed.gov/NCES/surveys/SDDB/wv.txt) 52% of West Virginia public school students are male; and 95% are classified white, 3.6% African American, 0.4% Asian, and 0.8% are of other backgrounds. Data in the SDDB are derived from 1990 Census data.

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average and seldom from impoverished families. This is a tremendous difference, if veiled by lack of data in this case.

The community perception questionnaires (ideal and present) that were completed by both the GHA students and by the seniors in the Scholars' home schools were each composed of 29 identical items tied to a different set of instructions. Items merely listed possible community resources (e.g., availability of good paying jobs, opportunities to learn new skills and develop talents, etc.) and the instructions asked students to rate, on a 1 to 5 scale (5=highest rating or strongest agreement), the importance of the resource given in the item to their ideal community (ideal community questionnaire) or to rate their satisfaction with the resource in the community in which they were then living (current community questionnaire).

Top-rated items on the ideal community questionnaire, each with mean ratings above 4.0, for the rural-students-at-large (in rank order) were:

1. Good paying jobs,
2. Clean and healthy living environment,
3. Help for the unemployed to find jobs,
4. Activities and places for teenagers to interact safely, and
5. High-quality community/area hospital.

For the GHA students, the top-rated items on the ideal community questionnaire were:

1. Clean and healthy living environment,
2. Top quality schools,
3. Good paying jobs,
4. Local government that keeps order,
5. Activities and places for teenagers to interact safely.

A possible measure of satisfaction with current community, of course, would how well these most important items fared in item rankings on the two groups' current community questionnaire. Among both groups "clean and healthy living environment," "good paying jobs,"

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and "activities and places for teenagers to interact safely" ranked in the top five. It seems reasonable to conclude that the two groups share perceptions; however, GHA students consider top quality schools (2nd place rating) more important than rural-students-at-large (8th place rating) when thinking about an "ideal community" in which to live. Tests of our hypotheses, reported next, examine related issues more systematically.

Hypothesis 1. The Dean Alienation Scale provides three subscales, as noted previously: isolation, powerlessness, normlessness. We computed these according to directions supplied by the author of the scale, as well as a total alienation score (merely the sum of subscale total scores). We conducted a one-way analysis of variance on all four measures. All four measures revealed higher levels of alienation among the rural-students-at-large as compared to the GHA students, contrary to the hypothesis. In standard deviation units, the differences of greatest magnitude between the groups were on powerlessness (where the mean score of the GHA group was .80 sd units lower than those of the rural-students at large) and total alienation (about .70 sd lower). This is a practically significant degree of difference and it could be said that these gifted students are substantially *less alienated* than typical rural students. Table 1 summarizes these results.

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Table 1

One-way Analysis of Variance[a]
Alienation (GHA students vs. Rural-Students-At-Large)

	df	F	p	means[b]	sd[c]	se[c]
isolation	1,779	9.59	.002	29.57, 28.26	4.71	.17
powerlessness	1,786	85.41	.000	31.43, 27.77	4.64	.17
normlessness	1,774	36.10	.000	19.44, 17.41	3.82	.14
alienation total	1,751	58.59	.000	80.51, 73.34	10.59	.39

Notes. a. homogeneity of variance confirmed
b. rural-students-at-large, GHA students
c. for total sample

Hypothesis 2. A single item administered to both cohorts can be used to provide some evidence about susceptibility to relocate outside the local community. This item assessed attachment to community, thus: "My community/area is very close to being the kind of place I would hate to leave." With homogeneity of variance established, the ANOVA procedure revealed no statistically significant difference in the mean rating assigned by students in the two cohorts (3.27 for the GHA students vs. 3.37 for the rural students at large, p=.36). On the basis of this item, one would conclude that GHA students are no more inclined than rural-students-at-large to leave their local communities. (Findings from an ancillary analysis, reported later in this article, modify this conclusion.)

Hypothesis 3. We can address this hypothesis (relating to satisfaction with present community) with greater assurance than hypothesis 2 because the community value scale of 29 satisfaction items can be understood to reflect overall community satisfaction--the higher the sum

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of ratings for all items, the more satisfied the respondent would appear to be. We assessed the differences in means of GHA vs. rural students (84.44 vs. 78.97) with a one-way ANOVA and confirmed a significant difference at $p < .01$ (1,756 df; F=10.09; p=.0015; sd=19.16; se=.70). GHA students are *more satisfied* with their present communities than are rural-students-at-large, a finding that runs counter to the hypothesis. (The ancillary analysis also modifies this conclusion.)

Hypothesis 4. To examine this hypothesis (relating to valuing modern amenities) , we used the "ideal community" item set. This set employed the same 29 items as were used above, but with a different set of instructions. Students were asked to rate the contribution each item would make to their satisfaction in an ideal community--things a community would have to have to make them "happy and content living there." We selected items representing ambition, expertise, and individual well-being as reflecting characteristics commonly associated with 'becoming modern' (cf. McClelland et al., 1958; Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Howley, 1995). Using 9 items (see Table 2) we constructed a scale (alpha=.81 for the entire sample of scores) and attempted a comparison of means (one-way ANOVA). Though observed means were quite clearly higher for GHA students (by about 1/3 of the larger standard deviation), the requirement of homogeneity of variance was not met.

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Table 2

Items in Modern Disposition Scale

v30 high quality community/area hospital
v31 good stores and shopping facilities
v33 opportunities for self-improvement
v34 variety of specialized professional businesses
v38 range of medical doctors with private practices
v43 many chances to get ahead socially, professionally, or financially
v44 extensive indoor entertainment (like movies, bowling, arcades)
v46 top quality schools
v52 wide variety of consumer products available

alpha=.8135, N=781

Unable to perform a valid ANOVA, we calculated a total scale score, computed the mean, and divided the sample into low and high scorers at the mean. Though less satisfying than an ANOVA, chi-square results indicate that GHA students are proportionately more numerous among students scoring above the mean than rural-students-at-large ($p<.01$).

Table 3

High vs Low Scorers on Modern Disposition Scale, by Cohort

		Low	High
Cohort			
Rural-at-large	N	254	372
	%	40.6%	59.4%
GHA student	N	42	113
	%	27.1%	72.9%
Total	N	296	485
	%	37.9%	62.1%

Chi-square likelihood ratio = 9.95, p = .00161
Fisher's Exact Test (one-tail) = .00114

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We also conducted a factor analysis to test the factor structure for the derived scale. For the full sample (N=781) the factor analysis derived a single factor with eigenvalues above 1.00, which accounted for 41% of the observed variance; all items loaded above .50 on this factor. We were curious to see if there were factor differences among the two cohorts and therefore ran the factors again separately for each cohort. To our surprise, the factor analysis extracted 3 factors for the GHA students, but only one for the rural-at-large-students. For the latter cohort, the amount of variance accounted for by the single factor remained at about 41%, but the additional factors for the (substantially fewer) GHA students accounted for an additional 20% of variance in the scale values. The rotated factor matrix (GHA students) is given in Table 4.

Table 4

Rotated Factor Matrix (Modern Disposition Scale, GHA Cohort Only)

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
V30	.35402	.47619	.27456
V31	.66073	.16627	.35509
V33	-.17627	.86742	-.01190
V34	.41058	.61077	.32629
V38	.28844	.26721	.61897
V43	.66296	.41374	-.10613
V44	.79811	.03055	-.06161
V46	-.07799	-.00679	.79918
V52	.74782	-.08639	.19805

Factor	Eigenvalue	Percentage of Variance	
		Factor	Cumulative
1	3.19481	35.5	35.5
2	1.29731	14.4	49.9
3	1.00951	11.2	61.1

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The factor analysis indicates to us the greater salience of the scale, "Modern Disposition," for the GHA students as compared to the rural-students-at-large. Alan DeYoung (e.g., DeYoung, 1990) has written extensively about the clash of modern and premodern values in rural education. The clash is salient to the debate about the kind of educational reform best suited to rural people versus reform efforts that may privilege purposes harmful to rural livelihoods and ways of living (e.g., DeYoung, 1995; Harmon & Seal, 1995, etc.).

Of particular interest here is the fact that the factor analysis accounts for 50% more variance in this set of scores and a finer structure with this particular set of values, as compared to rural-students-at-large. Items loading above .50 on factor one clearly pertain to a construct of acquisitiveness--stores and shopping, chances "to get ahead," entertainment, and wide range of consumer items. The other factors are a bit more difficult to interpret, but might be called business opportunities (factor two) and family infrastructure (top schools, range of doctors). Hypothesis 4 is key in many ways, and evidence suggests that GHA students do possess both stronger "modern dispositions," and more well-developed modern dispositions, than rural-students-at-large. The greater salience of "modern dispositions" for GHA students may indicate a combination of familial and educational influences that will make it more difficult for GHA students to realize aspirations for sense of place.

Hypothesis 5. We used the same procedure as used in hypothesis 4 to test this hypothesis, creating a "Rustic Disposition" scale from 10 items in the "ideal community" item set (see Table 5). In this case, we chose items that reflected values related to family, the land, and community cohesion (cf. McClelland et al., 1953; Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Howley, 1996)

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Table 5

Items in Rustic Disposition Scale

v39 agencies to help people solve problems
v40 nearby forest and open land
v41 organizations planning community well-being in future
v45 organizations to help people down on their luck
v48 close to relatives
v49 close to friends
v51 extensive outdoor recreation facilities
v55 community cooperation
v56 clean and healthy living environment
v57 places for teens to interact safely

alpha=.81, N=785

Following the same procedures as with hypothesis 4, we were unable to establish a significant difference in total scale scores between the GHA and rural cohorts. As in the previous comparison, lack of homogeneity of variance was a problem. Unlike the previous comparison, however, the observed difference, which *favored* the GHA cohort did not yield a significant difference in nonparametric (dichotomized) cross tabulations (chi-square likelihood ratio=3.41, p=.065). We therefore reject hypothesis 5; GHA students do not, in fact, value rustic or rural amenities less than rural-students-at-large.

Influence of rural places. Although a large majority of both the GHA students and the rural-students-at-large live in places that the rest of the nation would consider quite rural--places with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, this is not the whole story here. Some literature suggests that, in Appalachia and other parts of the rural Southeast, the culture of schools discriminates against children who live beyond the edges of town or outside the county seats (e.g., DeYoung, 1995; Reck, Reck, & Keefe, 1985; Robin Lambert, personal communication, November 18, 1996).

In our survey questionnaire, the residential variable was comprised of five options.[7] If one dichotomizes the data between the "country" values (farm, nonfarm country, and small town), one has a residential category that approximates the Census Bureau's definition of rural-farm and rural-nonfarm locales (living in the open country or in places with populations less than 2,500). The School District Data Book overview for the state provides comparable data for a rough comparison. Table 6 shows the comparative percentages. For the sake of comparison, data for the habitations of rural-students-at-large are also included.

Table 6

Proportions of GHA Students vs. All WV Children,
By Place of Habitation (Percentages)

Locale	GHA Students	Rural-at-Large	WV Children (1990)
farm, nonfarm rural small town	65.4%	91.4%	68.8%
towns or cities (pop. > 2,500)	34.6%	8.6%	31.2%

The proportion of West Virginia children living in farm and nonfarm locales (open country or places population under 2,500) closely approximates the percentage of GHA students

[7](1) On a farm, (2) in the country but not on a farm, (3) in a town with population less than 2,500, (4) in a "small city" with a population between 2,500 and 10,000, and (5) in a "city" with population over 10,000. The categories derive from those used by the US Census Bureau.

living in such places (as defined by the three smallest locale categories on our questionnaire). It seems reasonable to conclude that, in terms of rural habitation, GHA students are similar to West Virginia student generally.

Ancillary analyses. As indicated previously, SES influences our comparisons to an unknown degree, and this is at least a problem for interpretation. Urban residence, however, is to some extent associated with SES. Since we have a place of residence variable for both rural-students-at-large and for GHA students, we selected from each cohort a balanced sample of students residing on farms, in the country but not on a farm, or in small towns with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants (n=206, 103 from each cohort).

Using this sample, we reanalyzed data related to our hypotheses. The results were the same, with two exceptions. First, for hypothesis 2, in the case of the isolation subscale of the Dean Alienation Scale, the difference in scores was not statistically significant (i.e., rural GHA students were as isolated as rural-students-at-large). The results for powerlessness, normlessness, and total alienation remained the same. Second, with respect to hypothesis 3, the difference in satisfaction with present community between rural GHA students and rural-students-at large was not statistically significant (means of 78.2 and 81.9, respectively)

The differing results for hypothesis 3 (see previous discussion) suggested to us that differences in satisfaction with present community might exist within GHA cohort[8]. We

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[8]That is, in comparison to rural-students-at-large, GHA students were more satisfied with their present (more urbanized) communities; whereas, with the balanced rural sample in the ancillary analyses, rural GHA and rural-at-large students were equally satisfied (or dissatisfied). Logically, the difference might be attributed to urban and rural GHA students' satisfaction with present communities.

conducted the appropriate ANOVA with the sample dichotomized between students residing in places with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants versus others. The observed differences were comparatively large (81.9 vs 89.2) and statistically significant (p=.013), equivalent to an effect size of approximately 0.5. Rural GHA students are a good deal less satisfied with their communities than GHA students living in more urbanized communities.

DISCUSSION

The youth in this study--whether rural or more urban, and regardless of whether they are exceptional scholars--desire to live in a place with a clean and healthy living environment, good paying jobs, and that offer activities and places for teenagers to interact safely. The rural-students-at-large, compared to GHA students, place less importance on *quality of schools* when imagining an ideal community in which to live.

Holding on to home is difficult work for rural people, and among the students in our samples we found complementary conflicts. The pull of the modern is stronger for GHA students generally, but the push of the present (i.e., *lower satisfaction* with present rural community, see hypothesis 3 analyses) is stronger for rural students, whether GHA or rural-at-large students. The ancillary (proxy SES) analyses, however, suggest that talented rural students similar to the seven Rural Scholars (in terms of place of residence) experience both a *push* from dissatisfaction with their current communities and a *pull* from modern dispositions. Unlike rural-students-at-large, however, rural GHA students probably have greater resources (affluence, school success, and less alienation) to deal with the conflict.

The outmigration of the most schooled people, common in rural places (Armstrong,

1993; Hodgkinson, 1994), has been a predicted threat to the quality of rural life for decades (e.g., Counts, 1930/1961). The predicted disaster has not materialized, and we personally suspect that other threats have done most of the observable damage visited on rural communities in crisis: economic restructuring, a thoughtless quest for individual status (unwittingly reinforced by schooling according to some observers), an ideology of cosmopolitanism that dishonors community and particularity, and the modernist worship of expertise--which has wrested education away from a domestic and communal setting.

The global drift into service-based economic activity common in developed nations means that rural youth in places like the US confront a job market that is already very different from the ones in which their parents sought employment. Some observers go so far as to imply that a higher level of formal education is the only choice for rural youth. For instance, Reid (1989) argues

> that to get jobs that offer rising incomes and the chance for career development, youth must learn better skills and aspire to qualify for new occupations, perhaps in non-traditional industries. Accepting traditional levels of education may likely mean settling for a standard of living that is under continuing pressure and with limited chances of improvement. (1989, pp. 18-19)

Observers like Reid seem to regard the quest for higher and higher income and status as the unavoidable responsibility of all adults. Although the rural Appalachian youth in this study do value the availability of good-paying jobs in an ideal community, there is a difference between the aspiration for decent work and greed. Many observers have noted that, too often,

Americans have trouble telling the difference (e.g., Barzun, 1989; Bellah et al., 1985; Lasch, 1995). Our schooling might do more to help clarify for us the difference (Kincheloe, 1995).

On rural terms, strategies that influence youth to seek additional formal schooling via the quest for high-skill, high-wage, high-status jobs are troublesome (Haller & Virkler, 1993). They are not propitious for sustaining local community, and rural people generally understand this fact. According to Haller and Virkler,

> From the perspective of community development, it is not obvious that programs promoting the outmigration of a rural community's most talented youth are desirable, especially if that community is already economically depressed. Rural residents might reasonably view such programs as invitations to use their tax dollars to aid the economic development of distant (and richer) cities. It will be cold comfort for them to learn that those expenditures have only trifling effects. (1993, p. 177)

We suspect, with others, that society loses something important in this bargain. Schooling, and indeed the tenor and imagery of urban society generally, encourages rural youth to develop aspirations that lead them away not only from where, but from who, they are in relation to that place. The loss for rural communities is well known, if generally bemoaned for the wrong reasons. Seldom acknowledged, however, is the loss for the idea of community and the habit of community in whatever places increasingly mobile Americans happen to reside for a while (cf. Bellah et al., 1985). It may be the nation's greatest loss and the Achilles heel of the dominant economic power in the new world order.

For rural teachers, the inevitability of students' havir ; to choose to stay or leave usually compounds the difficulty of encouraging scholarship and academic excellence among rural

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students. Such encouragement is tantamount to displacing sense-of-place aspirations with aspirations for what we have called "the happy life." With Wendell Berry, we would argue that such displacement constitutes an immoral bait-and-switch routine. Rural youth can choose to stay, but they are likely to believe--with most of the world--that the choice is a mark of their failure. The can choose to move, but long--with most of their mobile rural friends--for home. Like all humans, rural youth try to be savvy about choosing between two evils. For only a few is it likely to be a very happy choice.

Rural students' choices are rational and honorable if one allows for the possibility of sense-of-place aspirations. Otherwise the choice to forego schooling seems backward and ignorant (and is most commonly described as such). Rural youth can contribute to the quality of rural life only if their native views are regarded and honored (cf. Hedlund, 1993). Results of this study provide insights about the aspirations of rural youth for a sense of place in an Appalachian state.

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